

## PUBLIC RECORDS, OPEN MEETINGS. LEGISLATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.

PROP

59

### ARGUMENT Against Proposition 59

This measure does not go far enough in guaranteeing the people access to information and documents possessed by state and local government agencies.

In fact, this measure only provides for a general “*right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people’s business*” and that laws in California “*shall be broadly construed if it furthers the people’s right of access, and narrowly construed if it limits the right of access.*”

Laws are construed (i.e., interpreted) by officials charged with following them—and by courts when asked. The rule of interpretation contained in this measure would probably have a very limited effect.

Indeed, this measure explicitly states that it does not supersede or modify any “*right to privacy guaranteed by Section 1*” of Article I of the California Constitution.

While a right to privacy—especially against government intrusion—is critical in today’s society—government employee groups are using the state constitution’s “right to privacy” to hide the amount of money, benefits, and perks they receive at public expense!

Proposition 59 may be better than nothing, but it does not go far enough. The question is whether to vote “yes” and hope for more or vote “no” and demand more.

GARY B. WESLEY, *Attorney at Law*

### REBUTTAL to Argument Against Proposition 59

Mr. Wesley’s skepticism of open government laws is understandable. Several years ago, when he sued his city council under the open meeting law alleging it had illegally used a closed session to discuss a topic not mentioned on the agenda, the court would not let him question the council members about what they had discussed behind closed doors.

The court concluded that because the law did not expressly authorize such questioning and because it contained other provisions protecting closed session discussions, government officials could not be asked about what they discussed even to obtain evidence for trial, and even if there was no other way of proving a violation of the law.

In other words, he lost because the court applied the general rule of access narrowly, and the exception allowing secrecy broadly—precisely what Proposition 59 would reverse.

As for privacy, the constitution has never been interpreted to protect the abuse of official authority or the wasting of public resources by anyone, and Proposition 59 will not create a screen for anyone to use in hiding fraud, waste, or other serious misconduct.

On the contrary, Proposition 59 will add independent force to the state’s laws requiring government transparency. It will create a window on how all public bodies and officials conduct the public’s business, for well or ill, while sparing the dignity and reputations of ordinary people, public employees, and even high officials who have done nothing to merit public censure or concern.

MIKE MACHADO, *State Senator*

THOMAS W. NEWTON, *General Counsel*  
*California Newspaper Publishers Association*

JOHN RUSSO, *City Attorney*  
*City of Oakland*